



CITY OF WORCESTER, MASSACHUSETTS
Department of Health & Human Services
Division of Public Health



Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

Matilde Castiel, MD
Health & Human Services
Commissioner

Karyn E. Clark
Public Health
Director

DATE: September 14, 2020
RE: WORCESTER BOARD OF HEALTH MEETING
START TIME: 6:30 PM
LOCATION: WEBEX CONFERENCE CALL

Welcome & Introductions:

Meeting was called to order at 6:32pm.

Members on call: Edith Claros, PhD, Chair, Jerry Gurwitz, MD, Vice Chair, Frances Anthes, Chareese Allen and David Fort WPDH Staff: Karyn Clark, Director of DPH, Michael Hirsh, MD, Medical Director of DPH, Matilde Castiel, MD, Commissioner of HHS and Patricia Bruchmann, RN, Chief Public Health Nurse Guests: Cheryl Lapriore and Jeanne Shirshac, both from UMMHC

Approval of the August 24, 2020 Meeting Minutes:

Motion to approve the WBOH meeting minutes of August 24, 2020 made by Frances Anthes, Seconded by –Chareese Allen – Approved

Presentation and discussion of COVID19 Equity Task Force:

Matilde Castiel, MD, Commissioner of HHS: Read the American College of Surgeons, *Call to Action on Racism as a Public Health Crisis 2020*, from the New Yorker Magazine. Racism is the preexisting condition that was exposed by the COVID19 pandemic and exacerbated the deadly impact the virus has on Black, Brown and indigenous communities. Edward Augustus Jr., City Manager and UMass Memorial Health Care, President and CEO Eric Dickson, MD, called for the City of Worcester, Department of Health and Human Services and UMass Memorial Health Care, to convene the COVID19 Equity Task Force on May 1, 2020. The Task Force is chaired by Dr. Castiel and UMass Memorial Chief of Staff, Cheryl Lapriore. The Task Force is comprised of a diverse group of over 56 leaders from all segments of the community and the clinical system. It aims to take a deep review of the systemic racial inequities that exist in our health care system and are illuminated by the current COVID19 pandemic. Racism is a driving force of the social determinants of health (like housing, education and employment) and is a barrier to health equity. With over 22 organizations collaborating under this mission, the group will work to leverage resources to address systemic barriers and provide equitable health care access for all. We must work deliberately as a public health institution to meet our community's needs in these areas. Health disparities are rooted in systemic structures that have been created by the dominant White culture of our society. Briefed the BOH on the timeline of systemic racism and its implications on Public Health. The average life expectancy of African Americans is four years lower than the rest of the



25 Meade Street, Worcester, MA 01610-2715 Phone: (508) 799-8531 Fax: (508) 799-8572
health@worchesterma.gov



U.S. population. Latino's in Worcester have a poverty rate 2x greater than White counterparts. Worcester's infant mortality rate for Latino and Black women are 3x and 2x greater than their White counterparts. 66% of homeless youth in Worcester identify as Latino, Black or Multiracial. Where you live impacts your wellbeing and health. Kelly Square area is densely populated by the minority community and has a lower life expectancy than the west side of Worcester, near Assumption College. Briefed the BOH on the working group activities: 1.) education & outreach, 2.) testing, 3.) access and 4.) data along with their accomplishments. Together these groups have helped to create a multifaceted community outreach model where PPE, resources and testing is provided on site. Thus far we have hosted 10 community testing events where 4,914 tests were administered to the public with under 2% positivity rate. Our education & outreach group has distributed 4,827 education kits with PPE. 896 flu shots were administered at these events.

Jeanne Shirshac, UMMHC: People of color are testing positive at rates far above the percent of the population that they represent. As of August 31, 2020, Hispanic COVID19 positives are younger than non-Hispanic positives with the largest group at 30-39 years old compared to the White race largest group at 80+ years old. In the last four weeks, Hispanic COVID19 positives remain high and highest at age 0-19 and 30-39 and an increase in white positive cases at age 20-29. As of August 31, 2020 the White population has been hospitalized the most, due to the age being 80+. COVID deaths have mainly occurred in long term care facilities.

Matilde Castiel, MD, Commissioner of HHS: 60% of social, environmental and behavioral factors, 20% of healthcare and 20% of genetics is what makes up someone's health. This Task Force will continue to work with the four working groups through multifaceted community outreach events. With our grant funding, we will replicate our model of care in these communities so that the most affected people can have access to resources, PPE and testing. We hope by continuing these outreach events, we will continue to build trust with our Black and Latino communities. We are hoping to bring COVID19 vaccines to these neighborhoods. Let us work to hold ourselves and partners accountable for our roles in influencing racism as a Public Health crisis. We together can make a change.

Edith Claros, PhD, Chair: We have to create opportunities for equal access to healthcare, jobs, education, and sports for children in schools.

David Fort: What movement has happened in the City of Worcester to try to change some of these things?

Matilde Castiel, MD, Commissioner of HHS: There has been movement in the healthcare system. The ability to realize that racism is part of what happens and understanding that piece and to be able to have some of those discussions that are being held at both the UMass Medical School and hospital helps. There is a process in place to continue to move forward.

Frances Anthes: Is there a plan within the city to address some of the other institutional aspects of racism?

Matilde Castiel, MD, Commissioner of HHS: That's the overall piece that we are looking at. Understanding about hearing the voice of people of color. Hear about what they feel, their thought process, values, what makes them afraid of certain things and what are their concerns. You need both parties to sit in the room together to understand and not take it as a personal act on anyone.

Cheryl Lapriore: This is bigger than just the UMass Hospital and Medical School. Healthcare delivery is provided by a number of entities and groups of people that extends to Saint Vincent Hospital, Reliant Medical Group, our Community Health Centers and private doctors. We are

working on healthcare to engage those stakeholders and at the same time we need to raise the dialog around some of the other carriers, such as education.

Karyn Clark, Director DPH: Health Equity is the center piece of the CHIP. The Greater Worcester Community Foundation recently provided some funding to the Coalition for a Healthy Greater Worcester for some training on anti-racism that is going to be done here in the city. Our racism and discrimination work group has been doing a lot of work and this funding will help elevate the conversation and make change.

Jerry Gurwitz, MD, Vice Chair: Are their on-going efforts to begin to educate and target these populations that are at risk, so they may be able to receive the vaccine?

Matilde Castiel, MD, Commissioner of HHS: We are going into those neighborhoods to build relationships and give them education on COVID19 and also give the flu vaccine.

Frances Anthes made a motion to commend the Equity Task Force for their work and offer to support them, as the BOH, in any way we can as they continue their efforts. Seconded by Edith Claros, PhD., Chair BOH members: 5 – yes, 0 – no The motion passed unanimously

Discussion of 8/24/20 BOH meeting with WPD leadership:

Edith Claros, PhD., Chair: Attended the Citizen's Academy Training, it was interesting to see the trainings the WPD do.

Jerry Gurwitz, MD, Vice Chair: Believes that institutional racism exists. There's a misunderstanding of what the BOH is. It's important to let everyone know that we are citizens, individuals with expertise in Public Health, volunteers and we are not a Department. We have a right to speak as individuals. Felt troubled how the last BOH meeting ended.

David Fort: Not one person on the WPD's leadership was of color in our last BOH meeting. Was troubled to hear the Chief of WPD state that there is no racism, discrimination, implicit bias and white supremacy that exists in the Department. They need to be held accountable. Believes that no one at City Hall is doing anything to tackle this. Asked that Edith Claros, PhD, Chair step down from her position for the way she conducted the last meeting. Edith did not let the BOH members respond to what Sgt. Cipro stated at the last meeting. Felt this was disrespecting the BOH members. Wanted the opportunity to speak.

Edith Claros, PhD, Chair: Stated that David's actions and words have been disrespectful to her and others. I disagree with what you have said. The Chair has control of the meeting and when people shout without asking for a turn to speak, that is disrespectful. Will not remove herself from the Chair and will not resign. Plans to stay with the Board until her term ends.

Chareese Allen: Extremely disappointed with the lack of support at the last meeting. When trying to speak, felt repeatedly cut me off but allowed Sgt. Cipro to attack the BOH members.

Frances Anthes: Shared her colleagues concerns.

Edith Claros, PhD, Chair: Hopes to continue to be able to express our ideas and thoughts and respect each other as colleagues and keep the focus as a unit. There are situations that are hard. Did not mean any disrespect to any BOH member. Hopes to be able to move forward working together as a team and be able to agree to disagree in a respectful manner.

Discussion of COVID19 updates:

Michael Hirsh, MD, Medical Director of DPH: Finding a lot of asymptomatic individuals, whom are not getting sick. Hospitals have a total of 12 – 15 inpatients of COVID positive patients. COVID is spreading in the younger age demographics. Don't know how much it will spike now that the

colleges are back. We have nine colleges in our City. Each have a different system on how the students will return to school and with testing. Over the last three weeks we have had a persistent rise in our weekly numbers. We are just below the state level of 7.5 positive patients per hundred thousand a week that would raise us to the red code that the MDPH designates for communities that are in danger. Overall, last week we got to a community percentage of positivity that was less than 10% since the very beginning of the pandemic, March 11, 2020. Need to continue with social distancing, wearing masks, hand washing, clean and disinfect surfaces and limit the number of people in venues. Robert Finberg, MD and John Sullivan, MD (both of UMass), are specifically looking to enroll the community of color and Latino to participate in the new vaccine trial.

Motion to adjourn; David Fort - seconded by Chareese Allen

Adjourn: 8:28pm

Next Meeting -- October 5, 2020 at 6:30pm

Potential Future Meeting Topics:

Update on Flu Vaccines

Updates on COVID19 vaccine

Updates on mental health in youth during COVID

Updates on school re-openings

Updates on opioids

Discussion on rotation of Chair and Vice Chair